

## LOVE AT DREAM LAKE

Gu ru 'phrin las ལུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

It was a cool morning with light rain. Everything was so calm. Han Han sat in a back corner of the Village Café near a window, opened his computer, and tried to read *Animal Farm*. A bird unceasingly chirped in a tree near the window, distracting Han Han, who periodically sipped a cup of Espresso.

Han Han moved his gaze from his computer to the isolated bird. As a gentle breeze made the tree sway, the bird gripped the twig it was perched on even more tightly.

"What a lonely bird. No one understands its life, despite its desperation," Han Han thought.

Han Han was eager to incarnate as a bird and immediately fly next to the bird outside the window to share companionship. He carefully concentrated on the bird, hoping it would feel someone was conscious of it.

A young waitress came to refill Han Han's cup. Han Han thanked her and gazed at the tree again. The bird was gone. Han Han had expected to listen again to the bird, but unfortunately, that was not possible. Han Han sipped his coffee and sighed.

The waitress took a pack of cigarettes from her fashionable jeans, lit one and, handed another to a young waiter, who put the cigarette behind one ear and said, "Thanks."

"Today, he's alone again. Where is Fei Fei? Probably they broke up," the waitress said.

The waiter replied, "I don't think they were romantically involved. They often came for breakfast as ordinary friends."

The young waitress said, "You're right. Han Han never paid for Fei Fei."

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"Did you notice Han Han has been unhappy since Fei Fei no longer comes with him?" the young waiter murmured.

Han Han was the sole customer and could hear each note of the café's melancholy music. The waitress and waiter's conversation disturbed Han Han, who groaned and left.

Han Han had habitually gone to the library with Fei Fei until she had not replied to his messages and phone calls, disappearing from his life.

Han Han stood outside near the café door and debated whether to go to the library or visit the old cobbler. Finally, he decided to visit the old man. He liked to talk to him when he was lonely.

The old cobbler occupied a place near the main gate of Han Han's university and had a big smile for every student. The students all liked him and thought he was a happy old man. Only Han Han knew he was not as happy as many thought. He and the old man shared their loneliness and felt better when they chatted.

The old cobbler was repairing a red sport shoe clamped between his knees. When he noticed Han Han approaching, a big smile spread across his wrinkled face.

The old man paused and told Han Han to sit on the small wooden stool next to him. He often asked customers to sit here. He tugged at glue stuck to his cracked index finger, took a small pipe from his yellow jacket pocket, lit it, gave a few puffs, handed the pipe to Han Han, and invited, "Would you like to try?"

Han Han took the pipe and said forlornly, "Why not?"

Immediately deducing something was amiss, the cobbler asked, "What's wrong with you? Are you okay?"

Not wanting his old friend to worry, Han Han replied, "I'm fine."

The old man stared at Han Han and said, "It's great if you are fine. I won't worry about you. You're a real man and can deal with anything!"

Han Han thought, "He's right. I am a real man!" and felt better.

Han Han liked to visit the old man because he often said this. Han Han wanted to keep on chatting, but he left when he noticed another red sport shoe near the cobbler.

The old man was puzzled by Han Han's abrupt departure. He puffed his pipe several times and resumed fixing the red shoe. Han Han looked back at the old man before entering the school gate. He was busy on the shoe and puffed strongly as smoke swirled through his white hair and vanished. Han Han was attracted by this image of the old man and paused, and then entered the school gate, hoping the old man would have a good day.

Han Han had met Fei Fei three months earlier in the school library. Short and, plump, she often wore a black skirt in summer. Over time, he realized Fei Fei had no friends and ate in the school's cafeteria after other students had finished their meals and left. Han Han imagined she did not want others to laugh at her in the cafeteria, so he approached her and struck up a conversation. They maintained contact and became more intimate. Fei Fei eventually confided that sometimes she wanted to end her life, which touched Han Han. They then grew closer.

Once, Fei Fei phoned Han Han. They met outside and went to the school sports field, chatting joyfully as they circled the field. Han Han recalled Fei Fei had shown interest in a pair of red sport shoes. Knowing she did not want to spend her parents' money, he challenged, "Let's compete!"

Fei Fei smiled and said, "What kind of competition?"

Han Han replied, "Running. I'll buy something you really like if you win. You can take me to the Village Café and pay for coffee if I win."

Fei Fei was sure she would win and said, "Deal!"

Fei Fei ran slowly in front of Han Han, turned, and urged, "Han Han! Run quickly. You're a man! Catch up with me!"

Han Han was delighted to hear this and, slowed down, wanting to hear it again. He pretended not to have heard clearly and said, "What did you say? Please say it more loudly."

Fei Fei said loudly, "You're a man! Catch up with me."

Han Han had a warm feeling when he heard this repeated.

A bit later, Han Han lay on the ground, defeated, and gazed at the blue sky. He smiled when Fei Fei's encouragement re-echoed in his mind. He gazed at her as she lay next to him, hoping stars would appear before Fei Fei wanted to leave the field.

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In the field alone, Han Han strolled around the track, listening to music. He recalled having made the same circuit with Fei Fei and suffered from that memory. He paused and looked around. A boy sitting under a tree near the field entrance came into view. He walked over to the boy, who seemed unhappy. He was wearing earphones and was listening to something. Han Han said, "Hello. Are you a foreigner?"

The boy answered, "I'm not a foreigner. I'm a Tibetan."

Han Han said, "I'm Han Han, but others don't call me Han Han."

The boy said, "I'm Bkra shis. Call me Ka Ka. What do others call you?"

Han Han hesitated and then said, "They call me Sissy."

Ka Ka looked at Han Han's double-eyelids and flawless face, and exclaimed, "No! You are handsome and tall. Maybe others are jealous of your good looks. You're not a sissy. You're a real man. Don't care what others say about you."

Han Han felt good and said, "Thank you!"

Ka Ka gazed at Han Han, whose good looks had captured his attention.

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Bao Bao, Han Han's roommate, was on the train from Chengdu to Xi'an and happened to sit next to Fang Fang. They chatted till Bao Bao disembarked at Xi'an Train Station. Fang Fang was heading on to Xining City where she studied, but before they parted, she asked for Bao Bao's WeChat contact.

Bao Bao had a girlfriend and was afraid she would know about it if he often chatted with Fang Fang, who sent him messages every

night. She continued, even when he did not reply. Bao Bao then decided to introduce her to Han Han.

Fang Fang called Han Han several times, but he did not answer. She then sent him messages through WeChat. Han Han randomly replied. He wanted to keep chatting with her to make them both happier, but he did not want to be trapped in a relationship and marry her, knowing this is what she wanted. Initially, he was interested. They had regularly chatted for at least two hours, and he enjoyed it. Over time, Fang Fang began to bicker with Han Han and complain, "You're interested in others," and so on.

Han Han wanted to avoid quarrels.

Han Han recalled visiting a neighbor with his parents on the second day of the New Year. They sat around a table and chatted, and periodically laughed loudly. Han Han was so embarrassed that his face turned crimson when he noticed his parents did not talk to each other. His father, a successful businessman, owned two large shopping malls. His mother was a government officer. Locals thought his parents were a model couple with a happy family. Han Han suffered because his parents did not talk to each other at home and even slept in different bedrooms.

One night, Ka Ka called Han Han, who soon walked into Ka Ka's room and chatted joyfully and loudly with Ka Ka. Suddenly, some boys rushed out of their rooms, thinking a woman was in the dorm. They imagined her to be beautiful woman and were eager to see her. Disappointed to find it was Han Han, they whispered to each other and reentered their rooms.

Han Han resented the students making fun of him, but he never showed anger to the students, hoping for at least acceptance.

The next day, Han Han was sleeping in his English class. His teacher noticed and shouted, "Han Han! What the heck's wrong with you? What did you do last night?"

Han Han jerked up his head and said quietly, "I did nothing."

His teacher did not hear what he said clearly, thought he had said something disrespectful, and shouted again, "Sissy! This is not your home. Go stand at the back of the classroom!"

All his classmates laughed as he trudged to the back of the classroom.

After class, Han Han stayed in his seat as his classmates left for lunch. Han Han pondered, stood, and headed to a classroom window. He put his left foot on the window sill and pulled himself up with his hands. His phone rang as he started to lift his right foot. It was Ka Ka. Han Han answered, but said little. Finally, he agreed to meet Ka Ka at Happy Bar.

Later, Ka Ka, took Han Han to Happy Bar almost every Friday night. Han Han got drunk for the first time in his life with Ka Ka in Happy Bar. He enjoyed the feeling. Drunkenness helped him forget his troubles. He was happy to drink with Ka Ka. Once he even found himself in a room in the Simple Love Hotel with Ka Ka. He was still drunk and had no memory of what had happened that night.

Han Han entered Happy Bar. The odor of cigarettes and alcohol filled the air. He inhaled the smell and looked around for Ka Ka. Many young people were dancing crazily and drinking. Someone asked him to sit with them, but he ignored this and kept searching for Ka Ka. Eventually, he found him at the back of the bar. Ka Ka was alone with two bottles of beer. Two glasses sat on the table.

Ka Ka slowly filled the glasses with beer when he saw Han Han. They smiled at each other and chatted. They finished two bottles and ordered five more.

Han Han noticed a young woman, sitting with a boy, holding his hand, and smiling at him. She seemed very happy. He looked at her carefully and realized it was Fei Fei. Han Han refilled his glass and approached Fei Fei, who was embarrassed. Han Han drunkenly asked, "Why didn't your reply to my messages?"

Fei Fei said nothing but held up her glass to Han Han who looked at her boyfriend and laughed. After several toasts, he returned to his table.

Han Han ordered five more beers. Ka Ka urged him to stop, but he did not. He drank two more bottles and dizzily could no longer control his drunken movements. Ka Ka sat next to Han Han and asked, "Are you drunk?"

Han Han loudly said, "No."

Ka Ka persuaded, "Great! Stop here! Please don't get drunk!"

Han Han put his hand on Ka Ka's shoulder and said, "I'm not a pussy. I'm a real man. What do you think, Ka Ka?"

Ka Ka held Han Han's hand and said, "You're a real man!"

Ka Ka wanted to say more, but Han Han's laughter interrupted him. It was the first time Ka Ka had heard Han Han laugh.

Fei Fei noticed Ka Ka was holding Han Han's hand and was happy someone was kind to him. Gripping her boyfriend's hand, they left the bar.

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It was a rainy autumn day. After the rain stopped, Han Han and Ka Ka were sitting under the tree where they had first met. Ka Ka leaned against the tree as Han Han lay on his back, with his head in Ka Ka's lap. They were listening to the same music, sharing one set of earphones. A gentle breeze made the leaves tremble, sending some flitting through the air around Ka Ka and Han Han. Han Han looked at the leaves sailing in the air. One finally lit on Han Han's chest. Han Han picked up the leaf, sniffed it, spun it between his thumb and index finger, and offered it to Ka Ka.

Ka Ka sniffed it and put it in his shirt pocket.

Ka Ka showed a picture of Dream Lake to Han Han on his phone. In the picture, a young couple sat on a white yak near the shore of a blue, boundless lake. The woman stretched her hands into the air, holding a red scarf behind the man. The red scarf fluttered in the air as birds flew overhead.

Han Han could hear the lapping of the lake water and the birds' chirps. He could feel warm water touching his feet as he held Ka Ka's hand and walked into the lake.

TIBETAN TERMS

bkra shis བརྒ་ཤིས།

gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

CHINESE TERMS

Fei Fei 菲菲

Han Han 韩韩

Ka Ka 卡卡